

OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION TO THE EPA  
by Grattan Puxon, secretary of the DFHA

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I believe we have all moved on a long way since the evictions at Meadowlands, Chelmsford, and Hovefields, Wickford in 2004 and 2005, which were a catastrophe in human terms and represented an overreaction by the authorities, their agents Constant & Co., and Essex police, who on those occasions failed in several important respects to uphold the law.

Since then the Metropolitan Police have adopted a protocol that covers move-on and eviction operations, which I assume the EPA would largely follow.

Our special areas of concern are safety law and human rights. The Code says that police officers must a) act with impartiality, b) have due regard to human rights and health and safety and c) take action if bailiffs commit a criminal offence - and, I would add, where they can be prevented from breaking the law.

The Code also requires a Risk Assessment that includes the circumstances of any eviction.

The DFHA has been working for five years to legalize the situation of the Dale Farm community under threat of eviction. We have been involved in endless planning applications and appeals, have bid unsuccessfully for consent for an alternative site at Pitsea, recommended by John Prescott, and are about to put in an Outline Planning Application to develop a mobile-home at Gardiners Lane South, Basildon, where a large housing project has been passed but shelved for five years. This would provide an alternative for all the families being made homeless at Dale Farm.

Meanwhile, the homelessness issue is being handled by our solicitors Davies Gore Lomax in Leeds. This firm was the first to mount a case in the Court of Human Rights for a UK Traveller James Connors. The initial test case regarding housing will be heard in Basildon County Court shortly, where we seek a ruling that Basildon District Council must provide land or pitches for mobile-homes rather than brick-and-mortar type accommodation.

The BDC is at the same time applying to the High Court for a ruling which will remove the requirement placed on it by the Government to designate enough land for 62 pitches by 2011 and a further 52 between 2011 and 2021. That case is to be heard on 28 July.

The Revised Code of Conduct of the EPA says members should uphold the law at all times and do whatever they are able to ensure their authorities use their resources in accordance with the law; and that you promote equality and act with openness, giving reasons for your actions.